Battlescape:
November 9, 2007
Aranas, Afghanistan
www.army.mil/medalofhonor/white

1) The mission
On Nov. 8, 2007, members of 1st Platoon, Chosen Company, 2nd Battalion (Airborne), 503rd Infantry Regiment, 173rd Airborne Brigade, headquartered at Combat Outpost, or COP, Bella, prepared for movement to the village of Aranas, Afghanistan, for a Shura meeting with village elders. There had been little communication with the village after their suspected collusion on a major attack months earlier on COP Ranch House – a former American post situated on the mountain overlooking the large village. The Ranch House attack resulted in eleven wounded and the closure of the outpost.

Moving under cover of darkness, the 14 Americans and approximately one squad of Afghan National Army soldiers made for the American-built schoolhouse on the southern edge of Aranas, where they would bunk for the night.

2) Signs of deception
Upon daybreak, the Americans and their Afghan National Army counterparts prepared for the meeting at the mosque. The villagers delayed the meeting, saying the elders were praying, for several hours until finally beginning in the afternoon, at around 1-1:30 p.m.

Villager turnout for the Shura was unusually large. There were more questions and villager engagement than the Americans had experienced in the past. At first, team members were hopeful about the level of interest from the village males. Then, the Marine Embedded Training Team member, Sgt. Phillip A. Bocks, alerted leadership that his interpreter was hearing radio chatter in a language he didn’t recognize. Bocks advised the platoon leader, 1st Lt. Matthew C. Ferrara, it was best to leave immediately.
3) Enemy forces attack
Several villagers followed the unit on their 10-to-20-minute trek up the mountain, to the shallow mountainside trail back to COP Bella. No sooner did the followers break off to the ridge above, did the ridgelines echo with accurate small arms fire. The enemy initiated a three-pronged attack, simultaneously hitting the patrol from Aranas, the scouts providing overwatch of the patrol from a ridge to the southeast, and the unit’s home – COP Bella.

4) White returns fire, takes RPG blast
Carrying a fully-automatic M4A1 rifle, Spc. Kyle White emptied his magazine in the direction of suspected and known enemy targets. After White dropped his magazine and loaded the next 30-round magazine into his weapon, an enemy rocket-propelled grenade detonated near his location, knocking him unconscious. As White awoke, an enemy round fragmented near his head sending shrapnel into his face.

5) Team cut off from platoon
After initial contact, the forward observer, Spc. Kain Schilling, White, Ferrara, Bocks and the interpreter were cut off from the rest of the patrol, whose members had been forced to slide down the cliff to the ground, 50 meters below and 150 meters to the west. White relayed a situation report to Staff Sgt. Conrad Begaye, who was part of the element that had jumped down the cliff.

6) White conducts first aid on Schilling
White saw that Schilling had been shot in the arm. He moved to Schilling and applied a tourniquet to the arm, which stopped the bleeding. White dropped his pack and realized his radio was now hit and not operational. Schilling’s and White’s only concealment came from the loose canopy of a single tree jutting up from the side of the cliff below them. The tree provided just enough shade to make the two Americans difficult targets for accurate enemy fire.

7) White drags Bocks to cover
White now noticed that Bocks was badly wounded – in the open – about 10 meters away from his location to the east. He yelled to Bocks to use all his strength and crawl to his position. Bocks tried, but his wounds were too severe to make any progress.
White sprinted the 10-meter expanse, with enemy rounds ricocheting around his feet and snapping past his head. White reached Bocks and yelled to the interpreter to go and treat Schilling. The interpreter’s attempts to move to Schilling were met with enemy fire, so he stayed at his location.

White began to drag Bocks toward Schilling. He realized the enemy fire was now concentrated on him, which was further endangering Bocks, so he sprinted back to the relative concealment of the tree canopy momentarily to draw their fire away from Bocks. After the enemy fire dwindled, White moved back to Bocks, dragged him a little further – until the enemy fire was too concentrated – and then moved back to the relative concealment of the tree. He did the sprint and drag several times, before finally getting Bocks to a more protected location. White applied a tourniquet to the Marine’s leg and treated him until Bocks eventually succumbed to his wounds.

8) Schilling hit, White conducts first aid again
No sooner did White realize that his Marine battle buddy was dead, did he look back to see Schilling get hit again by small arms fire, this time in the leg. White sprinted to Schilling, pulled his own belt from his pants and tied it around the leg as a tourniquet, stopping the hemorrhaging.

9) White goes to Ferrara
Once Schilling’s bleeding was under control, White noticed his platoon leader lying still, face down on the trail. White exposed himself to fire once again, crawling to Ferrara’s position. Upon discovering that his platoon leader was dead, White moved back to Schilling.

10) White establishes radio comms
Both Soldiers’ radios had been destroyed in the gunfire. White moved back to Bocks, under enemy fire, hoping to locate a functional radio. Bocks’ radio was still operational, and White established communication with friendly elements and rendered a situation report. As the only Paratrooper capable of controlling his fighting position, White provided key information that enabled his company and battalion to understand the enemy and friendly situation well enough to begin bringing mortars, artillery, air strikes and helicopter gun runs into the fight. This helped prevent the enemy from massing on the friendly positions.
11) Mortar fire concusses White again
White then heard a hiss and felt a large explosion from the cliff below. It was a friendly 120mm mortar round. The blast caused another concussion for White. As he shook off the effects of the blast, he could hear Schilling yell for him to answer the radio.

12) White directs ANA, MedEvac
After nightfall, White began giving the interpreter commands to relay to the Afghan National Army and established them into a security perimeter. The enemy was still conducting a recon by fire – shooting blindly into the darkness in hopes of having Americans return fire and reveal their location. As the hours ticked by, White made regular contact with the tactical operations center to track the status of the MedEvac rescue. White reassured Schilling, though he knew extraction was still a few hours away. White also consolidated the sensitive items - radios and weapons - in a central location, ensuring that no equipment was lost to the enemy.

13) MedEvac recovers casualties, White departs battlefield
The effects of multiple concussions were weighing on White. As he felt his physical condition deteriorating, he decided to request immediate MedEvac of Schilling. He knew if he passed out, the helicopters wouldn’t be able to find them, and Schilling and the injured Afghan National Army soldiers could die.

White marked the landing zone and assisted the flight medic in hoisting the wounded Soldiers into the helicopter. Only after all wounded were off the trail did White allow himself to be evacuated.

14) Aftermath
After more than four hours, the three-pronged attack on Chosen Company ended with the loss of six American lives and many wounded. Spc. Kyle White exhibited extraordinary personal bravery distinguishing himself above his comrades. He took charge of his element, arranged security and provided critical aid to wounded Soldiers in terrain with little cover or concealment. White exhibited extraordinary disregard for his own safety by exposing himself numerous times to effective and accurate fire, providing aid to two coalition soldiers, despite being wounded himself – thus saving the life of one Soldier. His ability to take command and control of the situation and render critical situation reports to his higher command also enabled Close Air Support and Close Combat Air to disrupt the enemy attack, allowing for the successful evacuation of all wounded and fallen personnel from his location.